

The
Social Evolution
of an
Indian Tribe



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BACK in 1890 the soldiers at Fort Bidwell, located on the great upland plateau where California, Oregon and Nevada come together, were hunting out from their hiding places in the lava beds the last of Captain Jack's outlaw band of Modoc Indians. Fort Bidwell was named after a famous general who shared in the fighting but was a notable friend of the Indians. After his death his widow came to be very widely known for her efforts on behalf of the California Indians. Twenty-five years ago the soldiers left the fort and teachers came in to begin a program of Americanization for these first Americans. In spite of the indifference and greed of many white people, this program has been definitely successful.

For ten years the American Missionary Association has cooperated with the government boarding school and the

superintendent for this district and has planted a church between the Indian village and the government school. As always, the home, the church and the school working together mean an advancing civilization. For years the Indians were houseless wanderers, with neither right nor ability to settle on the land claimed by the white men and build up civilized homes. Few are now left of the low, round huts made of reed mats or brush covered with canvas and gunny sacks, while there may be found here and there neat cottages with good hay ranches.

The houses of the Indian village, built on the edge of the military reservation through the encouragement and help of the superintendent, are becoming a very influential factor in aiding the Indians in the assimilation of American ideals. Every year the number of such houses built by the Indians for themselves increases, and every year they are better built and better equipped to be real homes. These appear like any ordinary cottage outside, but inside often have almost nothing in the shape of furniture except a pile of blankets in one corner and a stove in the other. Spring beds do not appeal to the Indian, and he is slow to see the cultural value of tables and chairs.

Superintendent Gray laid out the village with good drainage, on a slope close to the main public road near to a stream flowing from the hills, with fertile irrigated land for gardens on the flat below. The village has supplemented its water supply with a community well. It has its own fairgrounds and is steadily developing a normal community life, though the people still need, and chafe under, the wise regulation of that community life by the government official. Little financial assistance is required from the Indian Bureau except for the old and the sick. Patient guidance toward American ideals is the essential thing, but it is often a thankless task here as at other points where Americans and Englishmen have taken up the "white man's burden."

The Indian Bureau and Superintendent Gray, recognizing the essential part of a community church in upbuilding a



PITT RIVER INDIAN TEPEE

real American village community, several years ago gave to the American Missionary Association for this purpose five acres of good land across the creek from the village and on the side toward the government school. The church was located so that it could serve both the adults of the village and the hundred-odd boys and girls of the school. It is and will be more and more a community center, making definite the organized community life by furnishing a place where all can come together and think and act collectively.

The value of a church building for the expression of community consciousness as well as for common worship could not be better illustrated than in such a case as this, the evolution of a wandering tribe into a settled community. It is a social development well worth the study and guidance of the best thinkers in Christian sociology. The possibilities of the church building are only beginning to be developed.



MODOC INDIAN HOME, CALIFORNIA

As many as two hundred have gathered for special services and a hundred from the village are commonly in attendance. Besides the regular services in the Indian church, the school children have Sunday School in the auditorium of the boarding school.

Even if there were nothing more than this regular meeting of the adult Indians, with the singing and the teaching of religion, it would be an important factor in Americanization. But they themselves take part in the church services and thus develop a church consciousness, even though few are ready to "join the church" in the ordinary sense of the term. They are all a part of the community church, though they may fall far short of some of the accepted standards of church membership. The church is planned to serve in many ways for community interests as they develop and to help them develop. The basement has just been floored, largely by the work of the Indians themselves, who are steadily accepting responsibility for volunteer service in this as a community enterprise. This basement is to be used for the New Year dinner and for various other community gatherings, some with and some without that great social agency—eating together. A lot of equipment is needed—a cookstove, a sink and piping to bring water from the



INDIAN REED TEPEE, FORT BIDWELL

stream, tables and benches, dishes and cooking pans. What an advance in community life when, with the help of the Indian women, the community in the church building can feed a large company with cleanliness and order, also inviting their white friends to share their hospitality.

But community dinners will be only occasional events; the basement must also provide room for work benches where the men can make the cupboards and tables and benches for the church and for their own homes. It may take years to secure all these things and get these activities started, but it takes years to change nomads into a developed American community. It would be of little value to have the material equipment without the cultural development. Upstairs in the back of the church there is just the place for a sewing room, if a sewing machine, chairs and a little stove were provided. Plans for quilting bees are already being considered. The Indians have made a promising start in glovemaking, and there are many other possibilities of profitable work which could be developed with proper industrial teaching and guidance, all tending to supplant gambling and gossiping.

These Indians, mostly Paiutes, are good workers when

they have incentive and direction. They are not deficient in skill or intelligence. But ideas of community property, the wrong kind of community ideals, have discouraged individual initiative. The uncertainty of keeping what they have earned, on account of the greed of unscrupulous white men and the laziness of other Indians who sponge on them, has deprived them of proper stimulus to progress. They are now learning to work for themselves and to expect others to do likewise. They are changing from a tribal economy to a community life based on the achievement of the individual, in which he is protected.

Some people mistake Indian self-control for stupidity. Oftentimes you get flashes of humor which show that these people keenly understand human nature as well as the world of animals and natural forces around them. When an old white man, too old to work, came into the kitchen and saw the Indian cook sitting down to rest, he joked her about being lazy. She knew his chief occupation was smoking a pipe, and she came back at once, "Let me have your pipe, and I will work hard like you do." These Paiutes of Modoc County, like other Indians, dislike and despise the white man most when he loses his temper. Self-control is to them one of the greatest virtues. They



REV. AND MRS. J. R. SHOEMAKER

cannot understand a superior civilization which does not demand self-control.

The Indians who belong to the Fort Bidwell Superintendency, and who come in from time to time and may be reached by our Indian church, include the remnant of the Pit River tribe from west of the high range paralleling the Nevada border. The Paiutes, who make up the largest number, wander far over Northern Nevada and Southern Oregon. Those located at Summit Lake, old Fort McGary, sixty miles east of Fort Bidwell, often come in to the village and the church. Large numbers come when there is some special occasion like the Indian fair or the closing exercises of the government school. But the more there are together the greater the temptation to gambling and waste of time, and the greater the need for wise direction of recreation and social activities. At such times the Indian church ought to have a specially strong program and leadership. When the Indians have their annual fair, card sharps and operators of all kinds of gambling devices flock in to relieve the crowds of their summer earnings. And there are other exploiters who pose as friends and persuade the Indians to give up their money in hopeless efforts to push claims against the government. The thought of his "wrongs" has become an obsession with the Indian, and he will follow anyone who offers to help him "get justice." Another "Dr. Cook" has been selling these Indians membership in an association which promises as much and produces as little as the oil companies the North Pole faker promoted. Unfortunately, many good people with more sympathy than judgment have lent their names to the support of this adventurer, with the consequent serious embarrassment of the Indian Bureau and the missionaries in their slow and difficult social program which is built upon the acceptance of responsibilities rather than the claiming of rights.

In spite of considerable immorality, among these Indians growing out of housing conditions and other bad social customs, they have a notable pride in their children and par-



INDIAN CHURCH, FORT BIDWELL

ticularly in the purity of their blood. Some of the worst fights among the Indian women have resulted from gossip that their children have white fathers. This race pride is a part of that imperative need for self-respect which underlies all character. With incentive and opportunity, children of the tribe are entering and doing well in the public school, men are getting deeds to their property, and all are slowly learning that their salvation is in work rather than in claims against the government. To be sure, complaining of the superintendent and the missionaries is still a favorite diversion. Nothing is so obstructive to that social progress of the Indians which government and missions alike are seeking as when these two agencies can be made mutually suspicious and critical by the Indian's impartial complaints of each to the other.

Fortunately, at Fort Bidwell the superintendent, O. C. Gray, is a Beloit College graduate, with social vision and a faith in character training. He was a classmate of Dr. Oscar Mauer of the American Missionary Association Executive Committee. Probably few Beloit men, with the missionary traditions of that institution, can wholly ignore the missionary responsibilities of their work in the world, whatever it is.

The missionaries appointed by the American Missionary

Association are Rev. and Mrs. J. R. Shoemaker, who have had much experience both in frontier and city work. On Wednesday nights they teach Bible classes in the school-rooms of the government school by invitation of the superintendent, and have just presented to their pupils some fine Bibles given by the American Bible Society. The familiarity of these Indian children with the Psalms and Bible stories compares well with that of our best trained American Sunday Schools. Besides the regular Sunday afternoon service for the adult Indians, more like a big Bible class than a preaching service, Mrs. Shoemaker has a kindergarten class for those too young to go to the government school, and there is a great deal of visiting in the Indian homes, and even more coming to the missionaries' home for consultation and letter writing. There is also a big correspondence with friends of the Indian work who are anxious to know and to help.

One church sent in a small sum of money to provide a



CHURCH AND SCHOOL—MODOC INDIANS

Christmas for the Indians, and the Indian policeman, who had confiscated the loose cash in a gambling game, turned it over to the missionaries for the same purpose. With this church money and the gambling money the missionaries felt sure of a Christmas in the Indian village. But in addition packages soon began to come in until the spare room of the little parsonage was filled with stocking dolls, toys, games and picture postcards, besides such very practical gifts as soap, tooth paste and pieces for quilts.

One thing even more important is needed as a gift to these Indians to hasten their assimilation to American Christian civilization, and that is personal acquaintance and fellowship with the many white friends who are anxious to help. Fort Bidwell is so remote and so isolated that few go there except on business, and this business is not generally the uplift of the Indians. More personal knowledge of conditions secured by personal visits, and more expression of personal appreciation directly to the government staff, to the missionaries and to the Indians themselves for what has been accomplished will make the gifts of money and supplies richer and more significant. Please put Fort Bidwell on your missionary map and, if possible, visit the A. M. A. Indian church at that point.

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